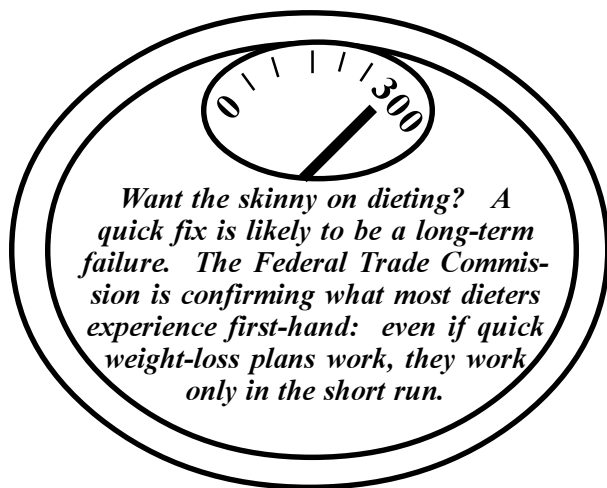


# Facts for Consumers



## The Skinny on Dieting



Federal Trade Commission  
Bureau of Consumer Protection  
Office of Consumer & Business Education  
(202) FTC-HELP [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov)

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**D**ieting is close to a national pastime. An estimated 50 million Americans will go on diets this year, and while some will succeed in taking off weight, experts suggest that very few — perhaps five percent — will manage to keep all of it off in the long run.

Although some people try to exercise off their excess pounds or inches, dieting is the most common way to lose weight. Recent surveys indicate that many dieters — more than 80 percent of women and 75 percent of men — eat fewer calories in their efforts to shed a few pounds. Unfortunately, simply cutting calories doesn't work for long.

Meanwhile, every year, about 8 million Americans enroll in some kind of structured weight-loss program involving liquid diets, special diet regimens, or medical or other supervision. Yet weight loss experts caution against fad diets, which rarely have a permanent effect. And they recommend that very-low calorie diets be pursued only under medical supervision because of their risks. The FTC also advises consumers to be skeptical of plans or products that promote easy or effortless long-term weight loss. They just don't work, according to the agency, which oversees the advertising and marketing of foods, non-prescription drugs, medical devices and health care services.

How can you tell the sizzle from the substance when it comes to claims about weight-loss programs and products? The FTC suggests a healthy portion of skepticism. Here are some claims made by advertisers in recent years — and the facts.



**“LOSE WEIGHT WHILE YOU SLEEP.”**

**Fact:** Losing weight requires significant changes affecting what kind of food — and how much — you eat. Claims for diet products and programs that promise weight loss without sacrifice or effort are bogus.



**“LOSE WEIGHT AND KEEP IT OFF FOR GOOD.”**

**Fact:** Weight loss maintenance requires permanent changes in how you eat and how much you exercise. Be skeptical about products that claim you will keep off any weight permanently or for a long time.



**“JOHN DOE LOST 84 POUNDS IN SIX WEEKS.”**

**Fact:** Someone else's claim of weight loss success may have little or no relevance to your own chances of success. Don't be misled.



**“LOSE ALL THE WEIGHT YOU CAN FOR JUST \$99.”**

**Fact:** There may be hidden costs. For example, some programs do not publicize the fact that you must buy prepackaged meals from them at costs that exceed program fees. Before you sign up for any weight loss program, ask for all the costs. Get them in writing.



## **“LOSE 30 POUNDS IN JUST 30 DAYS.”**

**Fact:** As a rule, the faster you lose weight, the more likely you are to gain it back. In addition, fast weight loss may harm your health. Unless you have a medical reason, don't look for programs that promise quick weight loss.



## **“SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGH... MEDICAL MIRACLE”**

**Fact:** To lose weight, you have to reduce your intake of calories and increase your physical activity. Be skeptical of extravagant claims.

The FTC agrees with many health experts who recommend a combination of diet modification and exercise as the most effective way to lose weight and keep it off — and a goal of losing about a pound a week. A modest reduction of 500 calories a day will achieve this goal, because a total reduction of 3,500 calories is necessary to lose one pound of fat.

If you want to lose the proverbial “few pounds,” the FTC suggests revising what you eat, cutting your caloric intake, and adding exercise to your weekly routine. Merely reducing calories often makes dieters feel hungry because it cuts down on important vitamins and minerals. This can end up

sabotaging your efforts. Revising the diet by replacing many of the calories from fats with calories from other food groups and exercising several times a week to increase the use of calories should keep most people feeling full, satisfied, and motivated to continue healthful eating habits. Many health experts recommend that adults limit their fat consumption to 25 percent of total caloric intake.

How can you lower your fat intake and cut your calories without feeling hungry, sacrificing important nutrients, or losing money? The FTC has the following suggestions:

- ◆ Before beginning any weight loss program, check with your doctor. Some diet plans have been associated with health complications. Make sure your diet is well-balanced, and meets dietary guidelines set by experts in clinical nutrition. In cases where obesity results in life threatening complications, medical intervention may be necessary.
- ◆ Consider all the alternatives before deciding on a product or program, including non-profit support groups, counseling services, physician-supervised programs, and self-discipline. Choose the one that's best for your needs and your budget.
- ◆ Follow a nutritionally sound diet plan. These often are available from hospitals, clinics, national health organizations, insurance companies, and health maintenance

organizations. Most libraries also stock a variety of books that include healthful meal plans and recipes.

- ◆ Remember that individual diet needs vary according to body size, health, and level of activity.
- ◆ Create a meal plan that incorporates your food preferences or modify an existing plan to fit your tastes. Be realistic: A low-fat diet doesn't mean swearing off fatty foods forever. It means eating them once in a while.
- ◆ Increase your physical activity gradually. Regular physical exercise can help reduce and control weight by burning up calories.
- ◆ Pill power cannot replace will power. Successful weight loss depends on a personal commitment to changing your eating habits and increasing your levels of physical exercise. There are no magic bullets.

If you have complaints about a weight loss program or product, contact your state Attorney General, local consumer protection office, or Better Business Bureau. Or you can file a complaint with the FTC by contacting the Consumer Response Center by phone: 202.FTC.HELP (382.4357); TDD: 202.326.2502, by mail: Consumer Response Center, FTC, Washington, D.C. 20580, or by e-mail: use the complaint form

at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov). Although the FTC does not intervene in individual cases, the information you provide may indicate a pattern of possible law violations that require Commission actions.

The FTC publishes several brochures for consumers who are interested in weight loss programs and products. Write for **Best Sellers**, Consumer Response Center, 6th and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20580 or call 202.FTC.HELP (382.4357); TDD: 202.326.2502. FTC brochures also are available at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) on the Internet.

